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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	ED-01	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-01	HHS-01	H-01	SSA-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	FMP-00	R-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00
	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/011W	

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2952
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HO CHI MINH CITY 000838

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PRM, EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMERASIANS SHOW SIGNS OF ASSIMILATION INTO VIETNAMESE SOCIETY

1. SUMMARY: IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE VIETNAM WAR, VIETNAMESE SOCIETY SHUNNED AMERASIANS AND CONSIGNED MANY OF THEM TO LIVE ON THE STREETS IN ABJECT POVERTY. OVER THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, HOWEVER, THEIR SITUATION SEEMS TO HAVE IMPROVED. RECENT INFORMATION SUGGESTS THAT MOST VIETNAMESE NOW TREAT AMERASIANS NO DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER
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VIETNAMESE. END SUMMARY.

"CON LAI MY"

2. AMERASIANS IN VIETNAM ARE KNOWN AS "CON LAI MY," WHICH ROUGHLY TRANSLATES TO "MIXED-BLOOD AMERICAN." IN THE WAKE OF THE AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM, AMERASIANS AND THEIR MOTHERS BECAME THE TARGET OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION. MANY VIETNAMESE OSTRACIZED THEM FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES. IN ADDITION, THE GOVERNMENT FORCIBLY RELOCATED MANY OF THEM, ALONG WITH THEIR MOTHERS, TO "NEW ECONOMIC ZONES" WHERE THEY LIVED UNDER CONDITIONS OF SEVERE HARDSHIP. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO DENIED MANY AMERASIANS ACCESS TO IDENTITY PAPERS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS CRITICAL FOR INTEGRATION INTO CIVIL SOCIETY.

3. THE U.S. CONGRESS RECOGNIZED THE DIRE PLIGHT OF AMERASIANS WHEN IT PASSED THE AMERASIAN HOMECOMING ACT IN 1987. AS REPORTED IN THE ACT'S LEGISLATIVE HISTORY, MANY "AMERASIAN CHILDREN ARE REPORTEDLY INELIGIBLE FOR RATION CARDS AND OFTEN BEG IN THE STREETS, PEDDLE BLACK MARKET WARES, OR PROSTITUTE THEMSELVES." THE HISTORY ALSO NOTES THAT "THE MOTHERS OF AMERASIAN CHILDREN IN VIETNAM ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR GOVERNMENT JOBS OR EMPLOYMENT IN GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISES AND MANY ARE ESTRANGED FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND ARE DESTITUTE." THE ACT ALLOWS AMERASIANS (DEFINED AS "AN ALIEN WHO WAS BORN IN VIETNAM AFTER JANUARY 1, 1962 AND BEFORE JANUARY 1, 1976 AND WHO WAS FATHERED BY A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES") AND THEIR CLOSE FAMILY MEMBERS TO ENTER THE UNITED STATES AS IMMIGRANTS AND RECEIVE REFUGEE
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BENEFITS.

4. TODAY, AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF AMERASIANS STILL LIVE IN VIETNAM. APPROXIMATELY TWENTY AMERASIANS EACH WEEK APPLY TO THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SECTION FOR ADMISSION TO THE UNITED STATES THROUGH THE AMERASIAN PROGRAM. TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE LIVES OF AMERASIANS TODAY, POST'S DEPUTY RESETTLEMENT SECTION CHIEF (REFOFF) EXAMINED THE APPLICATION FORMS OF RECENTLY-APPROVED AMERASIANS, SOLICITED INFORMATION THROUGH SURVEYS, AND INTERVIEWED PENDING AND PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS.

AMERASIANS APPROVED BETWEEN JANUARY AND MARCH 2000

5. THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE SIXTY-ONE AMERASIANS APPROVED FOR ADMISSION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM JANUARY THROUGH MARCH 2000 WAS TWENTY-NINE. FORTY-ONE WERE MARRIED, ONE

WAS DIVORCED, ONE WAS SEPARATED AND THE REMAINING EIGHTEEN WERE SINGLE. THIRTY-FOUR OF THE SIXTY-ONE AMERASIANS HAD AT LEAST ONE CHILD. NEARLY ALL APPLIED AS MEMBERS OF FAMILY GROUPS. INDEED, ONLY FOUR INTENDED TO GO TO THE UNITED STATES ALONE.

16. THE INTERVIEWED AMERASIANS REPORTED A NINETY-SEVEN PERCENT EMPLOYMENT RATE. THEY ARE EMPLOYED AS FOLLOWS:

LABORER	13	
FARMER		7
TAILOR	7	
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	VENDOR			7
	HOUSEWIFE			5
	BLACKSMITH			4
	DRIVER			3
	CARPENTER			2
	MECHANIC			2
	FISHERMAN			1
	BAKER			1
	LOTTERY			1
	CYCLO DRIVER			1
	HAIR DRESSER			1
	LOGGER			1
	BRICKLAYER			1
	PHOTOGRAPHER			1

ONLY TWO AMERASIANS REPORTED THAT THEY WERE UNEMPLOYED.

MOST AMERASIANS REPORT EQUAL TREATMENT

17. THIRTY-SIX OF THE SIXTY-ONE AMERASIANS SURVEYED REPORTED THAT, IN THE PAST TEN YEARS, THEY HAD BEEN TREATED NO DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER VIETNAMESE. PHUONG THAO, FOR EXAMPLE, IS AN AMERASIAN WHO LIVES IN HO CHI MINH CITY WITH HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER. SHE HAS NOT YET APPLIED FOR THE AMERASIAN PROGRAM. ALTHOUGH HER MOTHER URGED HER TO APPLY FOR AN AMERASIAN VISA IN THE EARLY 1990S, PHUONG THAO CHOSE TO STAY IN VIETNAM BECAUSE SHE DID NOT WANT TO LEAVE HER EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS. SHE NOW MAKES A

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LIVING AS A SINGER.

18. IN AN EXTENDED INTERVIEW WITH REFOFF, PHUONG THAO RECALLED THAT WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG, OTHER CHILDREN TAUNTED HER BECAUSE HER FATHER WAS AMERICAN. FURTHER, THE COMMUNIST YOUTH ORGANIZATION, DOAN THANH VIEN, DID NOT ALLOW PHUONG THAO TO JOIN. PHUONG THAO BELIEVES THAT THIS EXCLUSION DISADVANTAGED HER WHEN APPLYING FOR SCHOOLS AND EMPLOYMENT.

19. FOR PHUONG THAO, THE NAME-CALLING AND DISCRIMINATION ARE ONLY BAD MEMORIES FROM THE PAST. NOW, SHE SAYS, THE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE TREAT HER JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. NOT EVEN THE COMMUNIST PARTY IS OFF LIMITS TO HER. IF SHE WANTED TO JOIN, SHE SAID, SHE COULD. SOCIALLY, SHE IS TREATED AS IF SHE WERE FULLY VIETNAMESE. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN PHUONG THAO MARRIED IN 1993, HER HUSBAND'S ETHNIC VIETNAMESE PARENTS EASILY ACCEPTED HER INTO THE FAMILY.

110. PHUONG THAO AND HER HUSBAND ARE NOW CONSIDERING APPLYING FOR ADMISSION TO THE UNITED STATES THROUGH THE AMERASIAN PROGRAM. THEIR INTENTION IS TO STUDY AND PERFORM MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES FOR ABOUT ONE YEAR AND THEN RETURN TO VIETNAM. SHE AND HER COMPOSER HUSBAND WANT TO SHOW THROUGH THEIR SONGS THAT THERE EXIST AMERASIANS "WITH AMBITION AND GOOD JOBS, THAT WE'RE THE SAME AS OTHERS."

111. HONG, ANOTHER AMERASIAN, SHARED MANY OF PHUONG THAO'S EXPERIENCES. REFOFF VISITED HONG AT HER HOME NEAR QUI NHON CITY. BY THE TIME REFOFF FOUND HONG'S HOUSE LOCATED

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AT THE EDGE OF A COMMUNITY ON THE FAR SIDE OF QUI NHON BAY, A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY SEVENTY-FIVE PERSONS HAD FORMED AROUND HONG'S SMALL CEMENT DWELLING. VILLAGERS CROWDED THE DOOR AND PRESSED AGAINST THE WINDOW'S IRON GRILLWORK TO LISTEN AS REFOFF INTERVIEWED HONG IN THE FRONT ROOM OF THE HOUSE. HONG EXPLAINED THAT HER AMERICAN FATHER ABANDONED HER MOTHER WHO THEN ABANDONED HONG TO A FOSTER FAMILY IN QUI NHON. SHE HAS NEVER MET OR HEARD FROM HER FATHER. SHE MET HER MOTHER ONCE IN 1986 WHEN SHE RESURFACED TO CONVINCE HONG TO TAKE HER TO THE UNITED STATES. HONG REFUSED TO GO, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO REMAIN WITH HER FOSTER FAMILY.

112. IN 1995, HONG FINALLY DECIDED TO APPLY FOR THE AMERASIAN PROGRAM. HOWEVER, THE ORDERLY DEPARTURE PROGRAM

(ODP) REJECTED HER APPLICATION. ACCORDING TO THE CASE FILE, THE ODP OFFICER DID NOT BELIEVE THAT HONG HAD A CREDIBLE AMERASIAN APPEARANCE. [COMMENT: REFOFF IS CONVINCED THAT HONG IS AMERASIAN. NOT ONLY DOES HER ENTIRE COMMUNITY CONSIDER HER TO BE AMERASIAN, BUT BOTH SHE AND HER SON HAVE DISTINCTLY CAUCASIAN FACIAL FEATURES. ACCORDINGLY, REFOFF ENCOURAGED HONG TO REAPPLY FOR THE AMERASIAN PROGRAM. END COMMENT.]

113. HONG SAID THAT HER LIFE HAS BEEN DIFFICULT, BUT SHE DOES NOT NECESSARILY ATTRIBUTE HER DIFFICULTIES TO HER AMERASIAN HERITAGE. AS A CHILD, SHE WAS CALLED NAMES SUCH AS "CON LAI." SHE SAID THAT IT SOMETIMES MADE HER SAD TO BE REMINDED OF HER LOST PARENTS. CURRENTLY, HONG INSISTS THAT SHE IS TREATED FAIRLY AND WITHOUT REGARD TO BEING AMERASIAN. SHE OWNS A SMALL BOAT AND FERRIES PEOPLE
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ACROSS QUI NHON BAY. HER HUSBAND IS A FISHERMAN. SHE SAID THAT HER LIFE IS HARD, BUT NO HARDER THAN ANYONE ELSE'S.

114. TOWARD THE END OF THE INTERVIEW, LIGHT FLOODED THE SMALL ROOM AS THE VILLAGERS SUDDENLY PULLED AWAY FROM THE WINDOWS AND DISPERSED. A POLICE OFFICER AND A PLAIN-CLOTHED GENTLEMAN -- LATER IDENTIFIED AS THE COMMUNIST PARTY BLOCK WARDEN -- MARCHED INTO THE SMALL ROOM. THE MEN DEMANDED THAT REFOFF IDENTIFY HIMSELF AND PRODUCE A LETTER OF INVITATION. HAVING NO LETTER, REFOFF EXPLAINED THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT AND INVITED THE TWO OFFICIALS TO JOIN IN THE DISCUSSION. THOUGH AT FIRST RETICENT, BOTH THE OFFICER AND THE WARDEN ECHOED WHAT HONG HAD ALREADY TOLD REFOFF. THEY CONFIRMED THAT HONG, THE ONLY AMERASIAN IN THE TOWN, IS TREATED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND HER NEIGHBORS JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.

SOME CONTINUING INSTANCES OF MISTREATMENT

115. OF THOSE AMERASIANS WHO REPORTED DIFFERING TREATMENT, THE MOST COMMON COMPLAINT WAS NAME-CALLING. FOURTEEN OF THE AMERASIANS REPORTED BEING CALLED "CON LAI" OR "MY LAI," VIETNAMESE FOR MIXED AMERICAN, OR "MY DEN," VIETNAMESE FOR BLACK AMERICAN. THE AMERASIANS REACTED DIFFERENTLY TO THE NAME-CALLING. SOME, LIKE HONG, REPORTED FEELINGS OF SHAME OR EMBARRASMENT. OTHERS PERCEIVED "CON LAI" AS A TERM OF ENDEARMENT.

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116. THE NEXT MOST COMMON CONCERN OF THE AMERASIANS WAS JOB DISCRIMINATION, WHICH WAS REPORTED BY TEN SURVEY RESPONDENTS. OF THESE, A FEW SAID THAT THEY WERE NOT HIRED FOR AT LEAST ONE JOB BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN. SOME REASONED THAT THEY HAD DIFFICULTY FINDING WORK BECAUSE THEY HAD LIMITED EDUCATIONS. ONE, A THIRTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD LABORER FROM BIEN HOA, SAID THAT EMPLOYERS IN HIS AREA KNOW AND ACCEPT HIM, BUT WILL NOT HIRE HIM PERMANENTLY BECAUSE THEY ASSUME THAT ONE DAY HE WILL DECIDE TO LEAVE FOR THE UNITED STATES.

117. A FEW SURVEY RESONDENTS REPORTED PROBLEMS. THREE COMPLAINED OF "LACK OF RESPECT," TWO CITED CONTINUING EFFECTS OF POOR EDUCATION, ONE CLAIMED TO BE THE VICTIM OF ARBITRARY ARREST AND ONE SAID SHE COULD NOT JOIN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS.

COMMENT

118. THE INFORMATION REPORTED ABOVE, THOUGH BASED ON A LIMITED SAMPLE OF AMERASIANS, SUGGESTS THAT THE FORTUNES OF AMERASIANS MAY BE CHANGING FOR THE BETTER. WHEN THE AMERASIAN HOMECOMING ACT WAS PASSED THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, AMERASIANS WERE THE VICTIMS OF OFFICIAL DISCRIMINATION AND WERE COMPELLED TO "BEG IN THE STREETS, PEDDLE BLACK MARKET WARES, OR PROSTITUTE THEMSELVES." BASED ON INFORMATION COLLECTED BY REFOFF, THIS PORTRAYAL MAY NOW BE FAR FROM THE TRUTH.

119. IN FACT, REFOFF DID NOT FIND A SINGLE AMERASIAN THAT WAS BEGGING IN THE STREETS, PEDDLING BLACK MARKET WARES,
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OR PROSTITUTING HIM OR HERSELF. NEARLY ALL THE AMERASIANS IN THE SUBJECT GROUP WERE MEMBERS OF LONG-STANDING FAMILY UNITS AND EMPLOYED IN LEGITIMATE JOBS OR PROFESSIONS.

120. AT THE TIME THE ACT WAS PASSED, AMERASIANS ALSO REPORTEDLY SUFFERED DISCRIMINATION IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF RATION CARDS AND IN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT. THESE ISSUES ARE NO LONGER RELEVANT. THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT NO LONGER DISTRIBUTES RATION CARDS, AND GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT IS NO LONGER NECESSARY TO MAKE A LIVING IN VIETNAM.

FURTHER, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT CURRENTLY ENGAGES IN EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AMERASIANS.

21. THE INFORMATION REPORTED ABOVE SUGGESTS THAT AMERASIANS, NOW ALL ADULTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 24 AND 38, HAVE GENERALLY ENJOYED A POSITIVE SHIFT IN SOCIAL STATUS SINCE THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT SOME AMERASIANS CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE MISTREATMENT. SOME MISTREATMENT IS, NO DOUBT, DUE IN PART TO A CULTURAL AVERSION TO MIXED-BLOOD CHILDREN, COMMON IN MANY PARTS OF ASIA. IT IS ALSO LIKELY THAT MANY AMERASIANS EXPERIENCE EMPLOYMENT DIFFICULTIES BECAUSE THEY LACKED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AS CHILDREN. MOST AMERASIANS IN REFOFF'S SAMPLE, HOWEVER, APPEAR TO LEAD LIVES INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM OTHER VIETNAMESE.

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